



THE SCARCITY OF MEAT AND ITS CAUSE

(Written Specially For The Bulletin.)

Is it any wonder that meat is high when you consider the fact, reported by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, that there is a shortage of over 18,000,000 meat animals in the country as compared with the supply in 1910, only four years ago?

That is to say, while the population of the country has increased during that four years by some 7,000,000, the number of beef, mutton and pork animals has actually decreased. Taking 100 consumers as a unit, the department report for each such hundred there are today nine less hogs, seven less sheep and three less hogs than in 1910.

We've been talking a little, lately, about the farmers' opportunity along the line of increased production. Here is something with a direct bearing on that contention.

Meat is scarce. For that reason, if there were no other, it would be high.

The source of all meat is on the farms. The reason the meat is scarce is that farmers don't raise enough.

Therefore, by old-fashioned rules of logic, farmers are responsible for the scarcity of meat.

This looks, first off, like a copper-riveted sort of argument. I'm not going to deny that it is a real argument. It is perfectly manifest, anyway, that the reason why meat animals are scarce is that not enough are raised. It is just as clear that, if we had pitched in and raised 18,000,000 more than we have there wouldn't have been any scarcity as compared with 1910. Furthermore, there is no doubt that, if we had raised that extra 18,000,000, we could have got a big lot of money for them.

This is a strong point in favor of increased production. And I want you to see it clearly because it tends, when viewed alone, to bolster up my previous preaching in favor of just that sort of thing.

But I'd rather be fair and square in my argument. I don't want to hold up, as a shield, an argument which has holes in it through which somebody could prod me sorely.

And this very one has several holes in it.

Don't fail to notice that there's a difference between a scarcity of meat and high prices for meat.

The two ideas are really very different propositions.

An old rule of the political economist was that demand governed supply and that supply controlled price. That is, they maintained that whenever a big demand for anything arose, somebody would promptly rise up to supply it;—and that the price he would get would vary according as his supply exceeded or ran short of the demand.

It was a very nice theory, and it worked like a charm in those cases wherein it worked at all. Which particular cases, it doesn't need to be said, were the only ones the professional economists were ever willing or able or willing to consider.

But there are exceptions. This meat business is one of them.

It seems to me that a big difference who the price is going to, whether it rises with increased supply or not. There is no reason to suppose, from anything visible in the way of facts, that the farmers who must raise meat if it is to be raised are getting any more for it as much profit for raising beef, mutton or pork as they got in 1910.

Oh, yes, the consumers are paying more, much more, double in some cases. But the farmer who raises the meat on the hoof is getting very little if any more for his product of carcasses. When he does get a trifle of advance, it is more than eaten up before he gets to the market.

That is to say, the one set of men, the farmers, who could put a stop to the whole business of meat production if they wanted to, are denied any possibility of that profit by the manipulations of the market. Even the department of agriculture admits as much. While it claims an increase in the value of livestock, it adds that the cost of production has probably increased more rapidly than the increase in the selling price of livestock.

You bet it has!

Why, even I, convinced believer as I am in the wisdom and necessity of increased production, even I have sold off my sheep and thereby helped in my small way to reduce the mutton supply.

Simply because it had got so they cost me more than they came to. I like sheep; but I can't afford to keep them as pets at a continual expense.

When I started my little flock, some twenty years ago, I could get more for their wool than I can now. Any I was paid regularly the same price per hundred for my spring lambs, on the hoof, that I was paid for the last batch I sold a year ago this spring. At that time the price of dressed lamb from the butcher's block or cart to the consumer was less than one-half what it was last spring. I had to pay almost double, per hundred, for the grain I was compelled to buy to feed them, and my mutton was double for the hay, if any shortage of my own enforced me to buy that.

It isn't any part of our duty, as farmers, to raise stuff at a loss, in order that other folks may make more by handling it. Or in order to supply the market as a charity, either. I don't say that the butchers of my vicinity, who, twenty years ago sold at one cent a pound for live lamb and sold hind-quarters at eighteen cents, are making more money now, when they offer me the same six cents a pound for live lamb and ask thirty-five cents for hind quarters. It may be that their expenses have increased, but I don't think so. I'm not a butcher and don't understand the butcher's business. But I do understand that there is a tremendous scarcity of lamb; that there isn't anything like enough to go round; and yet that the market won't pay me, the lamb producer, one penny more for raising a lamb than it paid me twenty years ago, when lambs were not scarce and consumers were paying only about half present prices for the dressed meat. And it won't pay me as much now as then for the mother ewe's wool. At the same time I have to pay more for what they consume, whether I pay it to the grain dealer for imported feed or to the hired man for home-grown fodder.

My case, with variations, is the case of the average meat producer from one end of the country to the other. While meat is high and scarce and consumers have to pay exorbitant prices for it, the men who alone can produce the meat on the hoof are getting little if any better prices than a score of years ago, and are making smaller profits.

Therefore, they are going out of the business, here and there and everywhere. Therefore, they will continue to go out of the business, until there is a change in our distributing system, so that they can again secure a profit from their business, or, at least, days' wages for their work.

Pork is the only meat product for which the pig-raiser gets any marked advance over former prices. And the shortage in pork is shown by the department's figures to be less than in any other form of meat. The hog men are getting nearer to a decent share of the increased price of pork. Therefore the supply of pork is diminished less than that of beef or mutton.

There's no function of government which touches so closely and affects so vitally the well-being of both the great armies of producers and consumers as this question of food distribution from food-producer to food-eater.

And yet, while we can all get as excited as boys at a ball game over some petty question of partisan politics which isn't really any earthly importance to us, we can't and won't take interest enough in this fundamental matter even to understand it, much less, to command our government to do a little governing along practical lines.

In truth the long end of the lever is in the hands of the consumers. It is they who are really suffering the most, because it is they who have to pay the high prices. We producers don't get them, which is bad enough, but not so unpleasant as having to pay them. How long the consumers will stand it is for them to say, rather than for us.

Whenever they get ready to clean out the roads between them and us, and give us the chance to make any sort of profit by serving them, we'll meet them half-way and a little better than for us.

But, until enough of their good money goes to me to pay me at least day's wages for raising their meat, I for one shall not raise their meat. Nor can any farmer be expected to.

The laborer is worthy of his hire. Moreover, he has the right to put that in his own pocket,—not have it flung by a hundred pair of hands grabbing at it between paymaster and payee.

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NEW LONDON'S MUNICIPAL BUILDING

Members of Committee Explain and Appropriation of \$72,000 More is Made—Mahan Asked to Support Comstock For Governor But Makes no Promises.

It was evident at the recent city meeting in New London that the court of common council committee on the new municipal building placed all responsibility for the mistakes and errors of judgment in connection with the work on the building up to the citizens' committee that was appointed in conjunction with the foregoing committee. It is perhaps well that it was so. When Ex-Mayor Tinker, one of the citizens' committee, stated that confusion was going for the soul and acknowledged that mistakes had been made, and in connection therewith explained in detail the expenses to date, and the necessity for the recommended appropriation for the completion and furnishing of the building, the statement was being strengthened by the remarks of Geo. S. Palmer, another member of the citizens' committee, who declared that, in his opinion the money had been honestly expended, and if not he was ready to make good what had not been expended regularly and honestly, the appropriation of \$72,000 was made practically without opposition.

Mayor Mahan presided and he, too, had a word or two to say, in the line of honesty and integrity, on the occasion to speak words of praise for Mr. Tinker and the associates on the citizens' committee. Members of the common council took a very little part in the proceedings.

While every citizen at the meeting realized that the building should be completed without delay and for that reason favored the required appropriation, some of them attacked the methods adopted in the construction of the building and the fast and loose play with the contractor, who was accused of incompetency and showed where dimension stones were taken out in excavation and used in another building by a contractor who was superintending the excavation for the municipal building. He even intimated that the building was not being properly constructed. Mr. Casey is a granite manufacturer and contractor and could talk shop in a way that made it plain to even those who could not tell the difference between a dimension stone and a piece of rip-rap.

As Alderman Mr. Casey was the right bower of Mayor Armstrong, under whose administration the municipal project originated and was carried to successful issue, in keeping with the Armstrong business administration, but for the opposition of those who are now head, neck and heels in the present municipal building construction, Mr. Casey quoted a volume of facts relating to the early history of the proposed building, which he said were familiar, showed where, in his opinion, thousands of dollars of the people's money had been wasted, and all to benefit the business administration of Mayor Armstrong. Mr. Casey spoke at length and there was none to contradict what he said. Truth seemed to prevail in that instance. But when it came down to the real business, the appropriation of \$72,000 for the completion and furnishing of the building, including the grading, Mr. Casey, nor any other man, was strong in opposition, for all agreed that the building must proceed to completion and with the least possible delay.

When announcement was made in public print in New London that Charles W. Comstock was candidate for governor on the democratic ticket it was treated lightly and as a sort of joke on the legal gentleman who, as chairman of the state central committee and a plain every day member for many years, was among the recognized leaders of the party. Mr. Comstock was deposited as chairman of the committee a couple of years ago but that did not in the least lessen his ardor for the success of the party that he had helped to strengthen for many years. But few, if any, in this section really believe that he was even making a gun shot canvass for the nomination. Smaller men than Mr. Comstock, politically, and otherwise, than this same Mr. Comstock, and there are but very few, if any, who can give him any points on legislative matters, or who do not know about the game of politics is not worth playing.

According to the leading democratic politician in the city of New London, and perhaps in the state, there is no need to mention the name, Charles W. Comstock is actually out for the nomination for governor on the democratic ticket. Mr. Comstock and this local politician have been in training in the same company of late, but years ago they were a united working team. Within a short period Mr. Comstock broadened the subject to Mayor Bryan P. Mahan, reminding him of the good political work they had accomplished together and suggested that he assist in getting the nomination for governor for the gentleman from Montville and Norwich. Mr. Comstock is deserving of party support and if he really wants the nomination it should be handed out to him. He is one of the best known democrats in the state, is known to some democrat in every city, town village and hamlet in the state, personally known, and perhaps the action of the democratic convention nominating Mr. Comstock would meet with democratic approval.

While Mr. Comstock is a big man it is not believed that the party he represents is large enough to elect him governor. The nomination would be satisfying to the republican party and a safe bet that if the republicans were permitted to make the democratic nomination that Mr. Comstock would be the nominee, even if they would not work and vote for his election. Mayor Mahan did not say whether he would support the candidacy of Mr. Comstock at the next democratic state convention.

Strive Always for Higher Things. Sad will be the day for any man when he becomes contented with the thoughts he is thinking and the deeds he is doing,—when there is not forever beating at the doors of his soul some great desire to do something larger which he knows that he was meant and made to do.—Phillips Brooks.

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